



# Day In Day Out

WELCOA'S ONLINE BULLETIN FOR YOUR LIFESTYLE

## Physical Activity Helps Seniors Stay Mobile

A carefully structured, moderate physical activity program helped vulnerable older people maintain their mobility. A recent study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* shows that many frail older people can reap rewards from regular physical activity.

As you get older, reduced mobility can raise the risk for disease, disability, and even death. Regular physical activity offers known health benefits to a variety of people. But scientists hadn't identified a specific intervention to prevent mobility disability.

In the study, more than 1,600 adults, ages 70 to 89, who were at risk for disability were enrolled. They were randomly assigned to either a moderate-intensity physical activity program or a health education program focused on successful aging.

The physical activity group gradually worked up to 150 minutes of weekly activity, including brisk walking, strength and balance training, and flexibility exercises. Sessions took place at a clinic twice a week and at home 3 or 4 times a week. The comparison group had 26 weekly health education workshops, later followed by monthly meetings.

Over the course of the study—an average of 2.6 years—the physical activity program significantly reduced the risk of major mobility disability by 18% compared to the education group. Physical activity participants were better able to maintain their ability to walk without assistance for about a quarter of a mile.

"We are gratified by these findings," says Dr. Richard J. Hodes, director of the National Institutes of Health National Institute on Aging (NIA). "Participating in a specific program of aerobic, resistance, balance, and flexibility training activities can have substantial positive benefits for reducing risk of mobility disability."



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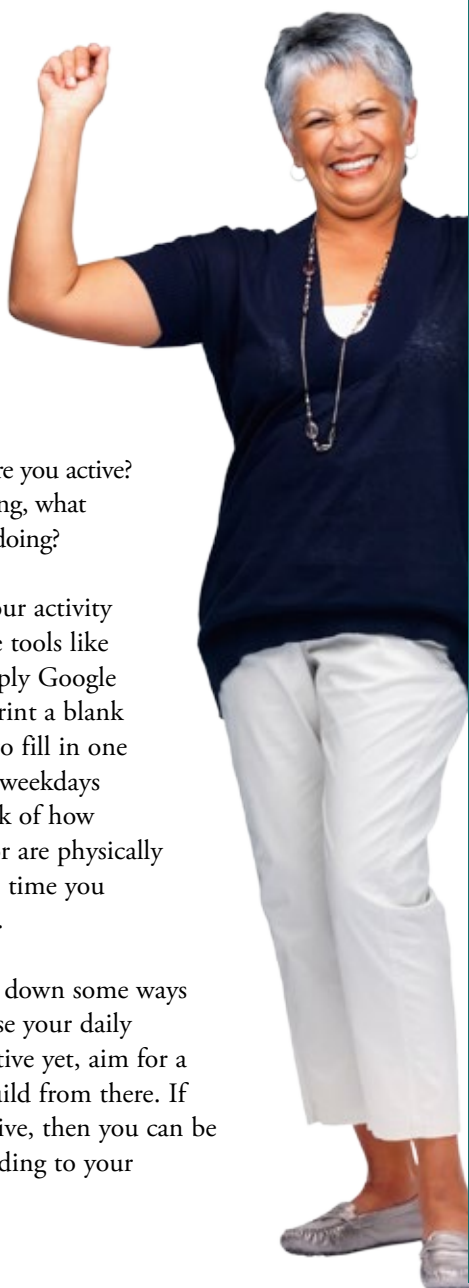
## Physical Activity: Your Starting Point

When it comes to exercise, the key is to know your starting point and build slowly from there. Knowing where you are right now will help you pick activities that are realistic for you so that you can be successful.

Think about a typical weekday and weekend day. How much time do you spend sitting? How much time are you active? When you're up and moving, what kinds of activities are you doing?

To help you figure out your activity level, try using interactive tools like "My Starting Point" (simply Google the term). You can also print a blank activity log, if you'd like to fill in one by hand. For a couple of weekdays and a weekend, keep track of how much time you exercise or are physically active. Record how much time you spend doing each activity.

Try to think of and write down some ways you think you can increase your daily activities. If you're not active yet, aim for a modest beginning and build from there. If you are already pretty active, then you can be more ambitious about adding to your activities.



## SET YOUR GOALS

Many people find that having a firm goal in mind motivates them to move ahead on a project. Goals are most useful when they are specific, realistic, and important to you. Your success depends on setting goals that really matter to you. Write down your goals, put them where you can see them, and review them regularly. Consider both short- and long-term goals.

Short-term goals will help you make physical activity a regular part of your daily life. For these goals, think about the things you need to get or do to be physically active. For example, you may need to buy walking shoes or fill out an activity log so you can figure out how to fit physical activity into your busy day. Make sure your short-term goals will really help you be active.

If you're already active, think of short-term goals to increase your level of physical activity. For example, over the next week or two, you may want to move gradually from walking to jogging, increase the amount of weight you lift, or try a new kind of physical activity. No matter what your starting point, reaching your short-term goals will make you feel good and give you confidence to progress toward your long-term goals.

After you write down your short-term goals, you can go on to identify your long-term goals. Focus on where you want to be in 6 months, a year, or 2 years from now. Long-term goals also should be realistic, personal, and important to you.